

Sermon: Drawn In: "Reintegrate" 1 Cor 12: 12-19 (Nov. 10, 2019)  
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I've often been known to say that the phrase "dysfunctional family" is a redundant saying. Because all families are dysfunctional to some degree. But what about churches? Have you ever been part of a dysfunctional church? Have you ever been part of a church more focused on arguing than loving? More focused on dividing into cliques than coming together in community? More focused on power plays than serving one another? Believe it or not, churches like this have existed since the beginning of the Jesus movement. In fact, it is just such a church that inspires Paul to create this metaphor of the church as one body of Christ with many parts.

It's a beautiful metaphor, right? But I think Paul intends it to be more than a metaphor. Paul intends for us to actually "embody" it. To live it out. But what would that mean for us to see ourselves as one body, but many parts? (*Pastor Brian Invites a couple of different people to do the "wave."*) They each did that pretty well, but it's just sort of missing something. But what if we all did "the wave" together? (*Congregation participates in "the wave" from left to right, and then right to left.*) So if we were to stretch Paul's metaphor just a bit, we might say that the church is like one big wave, with many different and diverse ripples, each playing their part! I can tell some of you still aren't convinced. Let's try something else. (*Pastor Brian leads the congregation in creating the sound of a rainstorm but rubbing their hands together, snapping their fingers, and so forth*). Again, if we might stretch Paul's metaphor, we could say that the church is like one big beautiful rainstorm, with many different and diverse droplets. It's a beautiful idea this: one body many parts...but that doesn't mean it's easy to live out.

This was what Paul wanted the church in Corinth to understand. He had started the church there – really many different house churches. He'd stayed with them for two years. During those two years, that new community thrived. He led them through all the steps of creativity we've been exploring together: he helped them dream God's dream, he hovered with them as they organized and grew, he helped them find connections with each other, he encouraged them to take risks, and he challenged them to listen to each other and the movement of God's Spirit. And all was well. Until he left...and then all hell broke loose. They started to break into factions and rivalries. Some apparently thought they mattered more than others. They divided into different loyalties. Some to Paul, some to Appollos (another Christian missionary) and some to Peter. They became a dysfunctional church, fractured into competing pieces.

Paul gets word of this and writes them a letter, in essence saying: "What about Christ? Forget all your differences, all your disagreements, all your factions. What about Christ? Remember the way he showed us. Remember that he is the center, the heart of all we are. It's Christ that gives us our unity. We don't have to agree on everything. We don't all have to be the same. As long as we remember that Jesus is the heart of the body, and we are all part of the body. And the body...is Christ. Notice: He doesn't

say the body is the Church. He says the body is Christ. We, as one body with many diverse parts, are Christ in the world.

Leslie Newbigin, the well-known scholar of Christian mission, once said that the Church is the hermeneutic of the gospel. Remember that word: hermeneutic? It basically means “the lens through which you see and interpret things around you.” So here is Newbigin sayinh that we, the church, are the lens through which others come to see, to understand, the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. What good news are we showing to the world in the ways that we live and love and serve together as a one body in Christ? What are we doing, together, to take this fractured, splintered world and helping to reintegrate the pieces in order to co-create with God, something new?

Maybe it all begins by realizing that we all are part of that one body, and we all play an important role. We all matter, each serving in different ways. We matter. Do you believe that? Which of us has every thought that we aren’t as important or as needed as someone else in the church? Just because the person who bakes the cinnamon rolls says “But I’m not the one who takes care of the finances,” that doesn’t make them any less important. And just because the person who takes care of the finances says “But I’m not the one who does the children’s message in worship each Sunday,” doesn’t make them any less important. And just because the person who does the children’s message says “But I’m not the one who directs the choir,” doesn’t make them any less important. And just because the person who directs the choir says “But I’m not one of the elders who visits the sick and the homebound” doesn’t make them any less important. And just because the elder says “But I don’t get to worship as often as I should” doesn’t make them any less important. And just because the person who makes it to worship but literally has no energy to do anything else in the church says “So I don’t matter as much as the others,” doesn’t make it so. We are called to be one body, diverse, with many parts, living together, learning together, struggling together, dreaming together, growing together, as a sign to the world of what God intends: unity in diversity, celebrating that each person, in their uniqueness matters and has something to offer.

Part of the vision statement for our denomination is that we strive to be a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. We are called to be part of God’s creative process of reintegration. To be that hermeneutic, that lens through which the world might see the good news, the Kingdom, a vision of what could be if we follow the way of Jesus toward unity and wholeness. We are to be like a beautiful song: many notes coming together in harmony. We are to be like a painting: many colors, many brushstrokes coming together to create a beautiful image. We are to be like a poem: many words, many phrases, combined to move minds and hearts. We are to be like one body, with many parts.

So, this morning we’ve come together to make a wave, and a rainstorm, but I’m feeling like there’s space to do one more thing together. Something that we can accomplish together so much better than we can separately. Are you up for one more group challenge? Well, here it is: Love one another. Love one another in our diversity. This is what Paul’s next part of his letter to the Corinthians is all about. It’s his great treatise on

love. That unity in Christ is really about living out love together. If we are to be a hermeneutic, a lens through which we witness to the world what the gospel, what Christ is all about, let us be a hermeneutic of love. The church, in essence, is an experiment in reintegration, of bringing together disparate, different, unique people, and drawing them together in their diversity to be one, not uniform, but united in love. That is the challenge of church. Are we up for that challenge?